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ABSTRACT

Differences between delinquency in the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. are reviewed, Soviet delinquency prevention provisions are described, and a threefold approach of treatment for delinquency used both in the U.S. and U.S.S.R. is explained. It is noted that in the Soviet Union there is a much greater emphasis on the medical model as an approach to the problem of delinquency than is presently found in the U.S., but that many methods found to work well with delinquents in the Soviet Union also work well in the U.S. (SBH)

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JUVENILE DELINQUENTS IN THE U.S.S.R.

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The Problem

The great majority of delinquents in the U.S.S.R. are guilty of "hooliganism" - examples of hooliganism for those under 18 years of age would be not paying the subway fare, fighting, or, most commonly, drinking liquor. Delinquent activity in the Soviet Union differs from delinquency in the U. S. in that Soviet delinquents engage in fewer crimes of violence and they are more frequently alcohol abusers. There used to exist a legislative lacuna for youngsters between the ages of 16 and 18 - who were neither required to attend school not to work; this gap seems to have been closed in recent years, but over 80 percent of institutionalized delinquents prior to the early 1970's were between the ages of 16 and 18 (Astemirov, 1969). The U.S.S.R. does not have a centralized collection bureau for crime statistics and the effect of recent legislation is always difficult to evaluate.

Some studies in the U.S.S.R. have estimated that more than half of institutionalized delinquent youth were convicted of alcohol abuse ("We continue the discussion of free time: Amuse me," Nedelya, No. 44, 1965, transl. CDSP, December 8, 1965). By comparison, the most frequent reason for juvenile adjudication in the U.S. is theft for boys and running away from home for girls. Adolescent male delinquency in the U.S. might be said to be commonly characterized by protest against perceived deprivation in the area of consumer goods. Relatively few consumer goods are available in the U.S.S.R., by comparison, and the Soviets tend to have low expectations for the attainment of consumer goods. Thus, delinquency in the U.S.S.R. may be geared towards escape from the present situation. However, delinquents seem to be delighted with creating excitement in both the U.S.S.R. (Hollander, 1969) and in the U. S. (Marwell, 1966; Thorne, 1971; Weiner, 1970; Zuckerman & Link, 1968). It has been suggested that Soviet

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youth are probably more inhibited and concerned about external controls than are their American counterparts - thus accounting for alcohol as a preferred form of delinquent activity (Hollander, 1969).

Many Soviet youth complain of "boredom." Life in the Soviet Union does tend to be drab and few opportunities for excitement exist. Youth in the U.S.S.R. seem so desperate for consumer goods that they are found waiting at tourist bus stops in sub-zero cold to exchange fifty cent medallions for one piece of American gum. Even waiters in what were described to us as being the finest restaurants were anxious to exchange medallions for gum - though they blushed at each exchange.

Among the anti-boredom provisions found in the Soviet Union one might include the Young Pioneer Houses - which provide after school and holiday activities for students. The Pioneer Houses somewhat resemble the scouting organizations in the U.S., except that they are more integrated in the social fabric of that country and provide dependable after school activities for youngsters whose parents may be working after school hours. The Pioneer Houses employ professionally trained persons and frequently counsel parents in appropriate parenting skills (there are also numerous television programs which attempt to teach parenting skills).

It is generally acknowledged that delinquent activity usually occurs during unstructured leisure time. The youth of the U.S.S.R. have very little unstructured leisure time - which may in part account for the considerably lower rate of delinquency among Soviet youth than exists among American youth. In our visit to a technical school, which seemed to be attended primarily by low SES youngsters who were poorly clothed, somewhat unkempt, and many of whom had missing teeth, we were told that the youngsters attended school six days a week for four or five hours while also working two days a week for approximately six hours.

The factors which are found in association with adjudication as a delinquent in the U.S. are somewhat similar in the U.S.S.R. Of those juveniles who were arrested for hooliganism in the 1950's, 68 percent had lost one or both of their parents. ("Theoretical conference: Antisocial phenomena, their causes and the means of combating them," Kommunist, August 1966, transl. CDSP, September 28, 1966).

Prevention

Though it is virtually impossible for the visitor to know what provisions are made for delinquent and pre-delinquent youth in the hinterlands of the Soviet Union, the major cities seem to have superior delinquency prevention provisions when compared to similar areas in the U.S. The provision of dependable and professionally supervised out-of-school activities in the Pioneer Houses, which generally include classes in ballet, music, arts and crafts, animal care, etc. for adolescents has already been described (incidentally, the great majority of the classes and activities seem to be sexually segregated - at the time of our visit only boys played chess and only girls took drawing, etc.

Additionally, school administrators and teachers in the Soviet Union are encouraged, as a matter of national policy, to see the school as the second family. When a youngster gets into trouble with the law, police notify both the school and the family. The importance of the school as a family is said to be one reason for the establishment of 10 year schools - schools which children may attend for the duration of their school careers. Unfortunately, a seemingly unrecognized side effect of the ten year schools seems to be greater class stratification. For example, the technical school which we visited was located in a dilapidated neighborhood where most of the residents are employed in tool manufacturing plants. Although we were told that students attending this ten year school could decide to go to the university after graduation, the quality of instruction and the general climate of this particular school did not seem conducive to serious scholarship. It could be assumed that a youngster who came

from a poorly educated family, lived in a poor neighborhood, and spent all of his/her school career in this school would be handicapped in academic achievement. However, the goal of the most recent five-year plan in the U.S.S.R. is that seventy percent of the student body attend technical school - unlike the situation in the U.S., there is no attempt to provide a liberal arts education for as many students as possible.

When a student does get into legal difficulties, many social forces are brought to bear on that student - including censure from the trade union, from the school faculty, and from the student body itself. When younger children get into trouble, the child's family is censured. The parents of juvenile delinquents are often fined by the courts for damages which were incurred by the victims (who are often reimbursed by the courts). Employers often lecture their employees regarding the need to be better parents. Children who have a record of getting into trouble are seen by clinics - which keep the child's history on file. The clinics work with both the child and his family. The clinics also prescribe the various types of medication which are also frequently used in the U.S. for similar problems. Any adolescent who is apprehended by the police is sent to a clinic for a medical and psychological evaluation. There can be no court proceedings until the youngster receives a clean bill of health from a doctor.

The ubiquitous violence of U.S. television has been implicated in the high crime rates of the U.S. - though empirical evidence of this supposition is difficult to obtain. Certainly, television programs in the Soviet Union are very different from those in the U.S. - violence is never presented as entertainment in the U.S.S.R. The Soviet people are very war conscious and the histories of the World Wars, in particular, seem to assume a place of prime importance in the instruction of every school child at every grade level. Nevertheless, television programming is seen in utilitarian terms as a source of instruction rather than as a source of entertainment.

Children's television programs are definitely of a low budget variety - frequently a narrator reads a children's book and the T.V. camera focuses on the pictures in the book. When one of our group of visitors queried some secondary school children as to their favorite "star," or radio and/or televion personality, it was clear that the children had no concept of favorite or famous media personalities. Most youngsters did not even seem to have any favorite programs.

Treatment for delinquency

Although the Soviets are gravely concerned about what they consider to be excessively high recidivism rates, their recidivism rates are enviable in comparison to those in the U.S. The recidivism rate for adjudicated juveniles in the U.S. at present is about 70 percent - that is, about 70 percent of juvenile delinquents will be convicted of another offense after release from a correctional placement. In contrast, the recidivism rate for adolescents in the U.S.S.R. is only about 17 percent (Hinners, 1973).

Meade (1973) found that the seriousness of the first offense does not seem to be related to recidivism, but that subjection to a formal hearing after a nonserious first offense is predictive of recidivism - similar findings have surfaced in the Soviet Union, where those convicted of hooliganism account for nearly all of those who are recidivists (Hinners, 1973). Unfortunately, the Soviet researchers seem to be interpreting this as a problem of insufficiently long correctional confinement rather than as a problem of undesirable labeling, with its concomitant self-fulfilling prophecy.

A threefold approach to delinquency which has been fairly successful in the U.S. on those rare occasions it has been used involves intensive educational remediation, group counseling, and job training and placement (Gagne', in press). This three fold approach is much more commonly used in the Soviet Union. In addition, the adolescents in Soviet correctional facilities exercise a type of self-governance which is headed by those inmates who best represent the official values. Given the very influential effects of peer opinions on the conduct of

juvenile delinquents (Gagne', in press), it is to be expected that such a system could be quite effective. Soviet correctional officials also allow inmates to earn better living quarters and other priveledges (Astemirov, 1969) - again, this is an approach which has proven highly effective in the U.S. (Gagne', in press).

Although the closely knit characteristics of Soviet society have facilitated the implementation of some highly desirable programs, the close communication which is to be expected among organizations in a totalitarian society has also resulted in undesirable effects for juveniles with records of delinquency. Soviet employers are nearly always aware of the criminal records of their employees and this knowledge seem to filter out to other employees with the result that the ex-offender develops negative feelings towards himself and towards the enterprise in which he is placed - it is not unusual for such youngsters to be drummed out of their placement by their employers, who don't want troublemakers around (Bluvshetein & Motskavichius, 1960).

One very unusual treatment for delinquency was mentioned to the author by persons at the Institute of Defectology. It was mentioned that dialysis is sometimes indicated in treating delinquency and similar behavior problems. This emphasis on purifying the blood is certainly not to be found in the U.S. and it would almost seem to be a carryover from medieval days. Surely such a procedure is not only prohibitively expensive but it must also be agonizingly frightening to the healthy adolescent. The Soviets want to avoid any implication that the social system might be responsible for juveniles' deviant behaviors and this makes it imperative that the individual or his family be found totally responsible for delinquent acts. Of course, the approach which best avoids implicating the social system is the medical approach.

Summary

In a visit to the Soviet Union, the author found a much greater emphasis on the medical model as an approach to the problem of delinquency than is presently found in the U.S. The social structure and cultural attitudes found in the Soviet Union are so different from those found in the U.S. that direct application of

the findings from one country to problems found in the other country are very nearly impossible. Nevertheless, many of the methods which have been found to work well with juvenile delinquents in the Soviet Union have also been found to work well in the United States.

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